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KOREA'S GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

BY

HOMER B. HULBERT, SEOUL.

The Peninsula of Korea, forming as it does a stepping stone from the mainland of Asia to the islands of Japan, and forming, together with Japan, an obstruction to the great "Black Stream" which is the Gulf Stream of the Pacific, has not only strategic importance but great ethnological significance.

In order to determine in what this significance consists it will be necessary for us to give a brief outline of the dispersion of the so-called Turanian peoples. This term Turanian is properly and necessarily a vague one, for it covers that portion of mankind who have left so few literary monuments, whose migrations have been so wide and so confusing and whose antiquity is so great that vagueness is an unavoidable quality. Recent study has done something to clear up the mystery, but still this portion of the race remains practically unexploited from the standpoint of the ethnologist. As to the origin of this great family we have nothing but theory, but there are a few large, outstanding facts which afford us at least a clue to a working hypothesis.

In the first place we are sure that the Turanian family antedated the Aryan. It has been satisfactorily proved by Bishop Caldwell and others that the Dravidian people of Southern India are of Turanian origin and were formerly the masters of the Indian peninsula. The advent of the Aryans, with their superior civilization, drove the Turanian inhabitants of India southward into the Deccan, where they survive, unmixed with the purely Hindu population. This Turanian stock, then, while not clearly defined, is confessedly some of the most ancient that can be even approximately placed. But these original inhabitants of India are closely allied, linguistically, to the Mongoloid races of Central and Northern Asia. The philological question has not as yet been exhaustively treated, but enough has been done to prove that there is a strong racial affinity between the agglutinative languages of Southern India and the Mongoloid or Scythian dialects of Northern Asia. It would seem probable that at some immensely remote period, before the Aryan race received its inception or even the Turanian races had taken on distinct form, a primitive race of semi-savages found their way

from the Iranian plateau eastward across the lofty mountain barrier that marks the western confines of China and descended into the valleys of the Yangtse and Hoangho Rivers. This must have taken place before the beginning of the pastoral age, while men still lived by the chase, for by no stretch of the imagination can we conceive of their transporting their flocks and herds across those bleak highlands. In physical characteristics they must have been of the Mongoloid type, but it is interesting to note that the so-called characteristics of the Mongol type—namely, the brachycephalic skull, the oblique eye, etc.—are common to the Malay peoples, the Eskimo and many others; so that these peculiarities alone are not enough to determine the Mongoloid origin of the Chinese people. After this emigration had taken place the rise of the pastoral era cut off these original settlers in China from communication with the dwellers to the west of the great mountain barrier and determined once and for all the isolation of China, an isolation that has remained almost unbroken. With the opening of the pastoral era a second and immensely great exodus took place from the original home of the race. This was the true Turanian family, which, apparently splitting at the apex of the Himalaya and Kuenlun mountains, passed south into the Indian peninsula and north into the steppes of Central Asia. This northern branch, again subdividing, passed eastward into the valley of the Amur and westward into Russia. The eastern branch penetrated to the borders of Korea and even occupied certain portions of the northern provinces of that country.

Meanwhile, the southern branch, which had settled in India, was overwhelmed by a subsequent Aryan invasion and driven into the southern mountainous portion of the peninsula or across the Brahmaputra river into Burma. The Malays may not unreasonably be supposed to be the result of this great hegira. But the Malay peninsula proved to be only another point of departure. They spread east and north into Oceanica and into that vast series of islands that stretch from Borneo to Bering Sea. The inhabitants of the Philippine Islands are Malays. The wild tribes of Eastern Formosa are Malays, and there is reason to believe that this great wave of emigration did not break until it reached the natural barrier formed by Japan and the peninsula of Korea. The evidence goes to show that two thousand years ago all southern Korea was inhabited by a people distinct from those of the north and practically unknown to them. They were a people of southern origin, as is proved by a conclusive line of reasoning, both philological and general. If this

be true, and the early settlers of southern Korea did actually belong to the southern branch of the great Turanian family, then it seems that China was simply encircled by the Turanian race, the two branches meeting about the centre of the Korean peninsula.

The argument in support of this theory is a long and complicated one, and it will be possible here only to indicate the most striking points in it. The powerful kingdom of Chosun, in northern Korea, fell in 193 B.C. Its fugitive king, passing southward by boat, came to the southern coast, where he found a people distinct from those of northern Korea in almost every particular. So startling was this difference that it has been clearly indicated in all the historical records of Korea. This difference was so marked that we may assume that the people of the south were of a different origin from those of the north, or at most only very remotely related. Their customs were in almost every case different from those that prevailed in the north. The names of their towns bear almost unmistakable evidence of their southern origin. The people tattooed, they lived mostly near the shore in little maritime villages. Their traditions pointed southward. Their language when compared with those of southern India shows a marked similarity—so marked that this alone would be almost conclusive evidence. We will notice that the “Black Stream” flows along the eastern coast of Asia in a northerly direction; and this must have had its influence, for any shipwrecked men would naturally drift northward. The traditions of the island of Quelpart, off southern Korea, state explicitly that the people of that island came from the south. The names of very many of these maritime settlements or colonies along the southern coast of Korea have endings which are an exact counterpart of Dravidian words, meaning a settlement or village. There is a marked physiological similarity between the people of the Korean island of Quelpart and the natives of Formosa. This is strikingly illustrated in the superiority of the women over the men in physical structure, which is true both of Quelpart and of Formosa. These are a few of the lines along which the argument lies for a southern origin of the people of southern Korea. But as the southern people ultimately came to dominate the whole peninsula and impose their language and customs upon the entire population of Korea, we may say that the Korean people are mainly of southern origin, with, of course, a strong intermixture of the northern element. The readiness and ease with which this assimilation was accomplished may be partly explained on the ground that during all their peregrinations the different branches of the Turanian race,

which, after surrounding China, struck on Korean soil, never lost the agglutinative character of their language. The vocabularies were probably distinct, but the grammatical structure had remained practically intact during the many, many centuries that must have elapsed since the original splitting of the family.

The population of Japan is probably of a similar mixed character. The Ainus, who formerly occupied that country, were in all probability of northern origin, but they were gradually driven out by the invaders from the south. If these invaders had come from the north the remnant of the Ainus would now be found in the south, but their very presence in the extreme north points to the southern origin of their conquerors. But we are met by a very curious problem in this connection. The phonetic systems of Japan and Korea are quite distinct, and the vocabularies of the two countries have almost nothing in common, while the grammar of the two is identical even to details. All a Korean has to do in order to acquire the use of the Japanese language is to put Japanese words in the place of Korean ones in a purely Korean sentence. Why should the grammar show such striking similarities when the vocabularies are so unlike? We may have a clue to this in the resemblance between the phonetics of the Japanese and of the Maori dialects of the Pacific islands. There is a very great similarity, for instance, between Japanese and Hawaiian in this respect, the principal point being the fact that in neither language can a syllable end in anything except a vowel sound. It is not improbable that the Japanese found their way northward from the Malay peninsula by a path which took them far out into the Pacific, while the Koreans took the more direct route up through the islands immediately adjacent to the mainland of Asia. During the long centuries which covered these wanderings vocabularies and even phonetic systems might easily become changed, while the grammar, a far more conservative feature of language, remained practically the same.

When we come down to more modern times we find that Korea exerted a very powerful influence upon Japan. Some two centuries before Christ, when the Chinese Emperor Chin Si proposed the building of the Great Wall of China and began to impress millions of men into this stupendous work, there took place a wholesale exodus of Chinese, who preferred voluntary exile to such a thankless task. Among these fugitives a goodly band crossed the Yellow Sea and found their way into the southeastern portion of Korea. A century and a half later, in 57 B. C., this colony of Chinese had

obtained a strong foothold in Korea. They had brought with them the higher civilization of China, but had wisely united their interests with those of the native Koreans, adopting their language and customs and intermarrying with them; so that after six generations of them had passed away a new combination had been formed and, as is so often the case in cross-breeding, a superior product was evolved which was destined to dominate the peninsula. It was in 57 B. C. that this new element founded the kingdom of Silla, which, growing out from a small centre, rapidly absorbed the surrounding districts until it was conterminous with the present Korean province of Kyung-sang. In this kingdom a brilliant civilization sprang up. Literature, art, science, commerce, flourished. In the ancient capital of that kingdom, the present town of Kyōng-ju, there hangs to-day one of the largest bells in the world. It was cast some time before 500 A.D., and is larger than the enormous bell which hangs in the present capital of Korea. At that time the inhabitants of Japan were little better than savages; but they learned of this new kingdom across the straits, and soon Silla became to Japan what Rome became to Ancient Gaul. It is probable that many subjects of Silla crossed to Japan and became teachers and even rulers. There are curious legends which tell how men from Silla, being supernaturally carried across to Japan, were immediately chosen as chiefs of Japanese tribes. It is very probable that the very noblest families of Japan to-day are descendants of these visitors. It has been a question of some interest to determine the reason of certain marked physiological differences between these noble families and the common people of Japan. All the evidence goes to show that they were this ancient Korean stock who did not colonize in Japan, but who went individually and became the true gentry of that country. Their number to-day in all Japan will not exceed ten thousand. Color is given to this theory by the fact that this superior element was first found in western Japan, opposite the peninsula of Korea.

The geographical position of Korea, then, has been of immense importance in that it has played such a leading part in determining the ethnological arrangement of the peoples of Eastern Asia. It has formed the link between China and Japan, and it has formed the link between two widely separated branches of the great Turanian stock.

But in these days her geographical situation has acquired a new and startling significance from a strategic standpoint. After standing for many centuries between the apathetic Chinese and the insu-

lar Japanese, neither of which ever had the power to overthrow the other, though mutually hostile, she now stands between a rejuvenated, active Japan and an aggressive, ambitious Russia, each of which has special and urgent reasons for desiring to enjoy a predominant position in the peninsula. Her safety seems to lie in pitting the two against each other. It may be that, as Père Hyacinthe said of little Judaea, Korea "has been placed between the great empires as a negation to universal empire—a pacific obstacle to the shocks of their power and the plots of their ambition."